

Virginia Department of Health
Test to Stay Guidance for Early Care and Education (ECE)/ Child Care Programs

(Subject to change pending updated CDC or VDH Guidance)

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Introduction

Test to Stay (TTS) is a practice that allows close contacts of individuals with COVID-19 who are not up to date on COVID-19 vaccines to continue to attend in-person school during their quarantine period, provided they have serial negative COVID-19 tests and remain asymptomatic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advises that K-12 schools may consider the use of TTS to minimize the impact of quarantine and limit school absences after a SARS-CoV-2 exposure in the K-12 school setting, based on [several investigations of TTS in K-12 schools](#) showing low SARS-CoV-2 transmission within the school.

Currently, the CDC is evaluating the use of TTS in the early care and education (ECE)/ child care setting. Repeated quarantines after a SARS-CoV-2 exposure in the ECE setting continue to place a significant burden on families and ECE programs, particularly because children under 5 are not yet eligible for COVID-19 vaccination. TTS is currently being implemented in ECE programs in several states including Massachusetts, Vermont, and South Carolina.

The guidance below is specific to ECE programs and is separate from VDH Guidance on [Test to Stay for K-12 schools](#). ECE programs that are housed within a K-12 school setting should follow the VDH Test to Stay Guidance for K-12 schools.

[Traditional quarantine](#) should be used if the program does not have the resources to participate in TTS, if the child does not have permission to participate in TTS from a consenting adult, for children under the age of 2, or for individuals who are unable or unwilling to wear a mask.

Section 1: Key Definitions

- [COVID-19 Symptoms](#)
- [Definition of a Close Contact](#)
- [Close Contact Exemptions for Testing, Isolation, and Quarantine](#)
- [ECE Program Eligibility Criteria for Test to Stay](#)
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COVID-19 Symptoms

All students and staff should monitor for the development of [COVID-19 symptoms](#). Symptoms may range from mild to severe and often develop 2–14 days after exposure. The list below is not comprehensive, and individuals may use the [CDC Symptoms Self-Checker](#) to further assess their symptoms.

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

If any emergency warning signs are present, including trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, or any other severe or concerning symptoms, please call 911 or seek care immediately.

Individuals who develop symptoms of COVID-19 are not eligible for TTS, even if they have a negative test for COVID-19 or are evaluated by a healthcare provider and have an alternate diagnosis. These individuals must follow procedures for traditional quarantine ([Protocol A-2](#)).

Definition of a Close Contact

An individual is more likely to get COVID-19 if they are in close contact with a person who has COVID-19 while they are contagious or still able to spread illness to others.

[Close contact](#) means:

- Being within 6 feet of a person who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period, or
- Having direct exposure to respiratory secretions (e.g., being coughed or sneezed on, sharing a drinking glass or utensils, kissing)

People who are exposed to someone with COVID-19 after they completed at least 5 days of isolation are not considered close contacts.

People with COVID-19 can pass the COVID-19 virus to their close contacts starting from 2 days before they become sick (or 2 days before they test positive if they never had symptoms).

Close Contact Exemptions for Testing, Isolation, and Quarantine

Certain close contacts may be exempt from TTS and traditional quarantine. These include the following:

- **Asymptomatic close contacts who recently had COVID-19:** People who have had confirmed COVID-19 in the past 3 months (testing positive using a [viral test](#)), as long as they do not develop new symptoms.
- **Asymptomatic close contacts who are up to date on COVID-19 vaccines:** People who are up to date on vaccines for COVID-19 as long as they do not have symptoms. For the purposes of quarantine, VDH defines people up to date on COVID-19 vaccines as 1) those ages 18 years or older who have received all [recommended vaccine doses](#), including [boosters](#) and [additional primary shots](#) for some immunocompromised people, and 2) people aged 5–17 years who have completed the [primary series](#) of COVID-19 vaccines.
- **Contact of a close contact:** People who have had close contact with a person who was a close contact to someone with COVID-19 (“contact of a contact”). If the contact tests positive for COVID-19, then the person should follow TTS or quarantine protocols.

ECE Program Eligibility Criteria for Test to Stay

In accordance with [CDC guidance](#) and [COVID-19 Community Level Guidance](#), VDH recommends that all ECE programs consider implementing [layered prevention strategies](#) based on the COVID-19 Community Level, including vaccination of eligible individuals, masking of individuals 2 years of age or older, physical distancing and cohorting, ventilation, handwashing and respiratory hygiene, and cleaning and disinfecting. Programs that implement TTS should consider the potential additional risk of COVID-19 transmission introduced by allowing known close contacts to remain in the program when making decisions about the right combination of prevention strategies.

In addition, VDH recommends that ECE programs have the following:

- Adequate resources to conduct TTS; including a designated point of contact who will be responsible for managing testing information, is capable of providing guidance to families, and to whom questions can be referred.
- Adequate resources to track and report information to the health department as requested.

Individual Eligibility Criteria for Test to Stay

VDH recommends that TTS only be used for individuals aged 2 years or older. Children less than 2 years of age are not eligible to participate as they are not able to wear masks and there are no rapid COVID-19 antigen tests licensed for use in this age group. Both students and staff

are eligible to participate.

To receive a modified quarantine directive that allows school attendance for in-person instruction, VDH recommends an individual meet all of the following criteria:

- **Asymptomatic Close Contact of an Individual with COVID-19** - An individual who has been identified as a close contact AND remains asymptomatic, who would otherwise be directed to quarantine according to routine protocol. The exposure can be one that occurred at the ECE Program, in the community, or in the household. The exposure may be masked or unmasked.
- **Not Eligible for Vaccination or Not Up to Date on COVID-19 Vaccines, including:**
 - Children aged 2–4 years who are not yet eligible for vaccination,
 - Individuals aged 5–17 years who have not received the primary series (two doses) of vaccines for COVID-19, and
 - Individuals aged 18 years or older who have not received all [recommended vaccine doses](#), including [boosters](#) and [additional primary shots](#) for some immunocompromised people
- **Able to Mask**- Able to wear a mask while at the ECE program during the 5 day TTS quarantine period followed by 5 additional days of mask use (exceptions for eating, drinking, and sleeping).
- **Remains Asymptomatic** - Has not developed any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 at any time since their exposure.
- **Consents to Participation.** Consent should be provided by the individual (in the case of an adult teacher or staff member), or by the parent/guardian (in the case of a child). The participating individual or parent/guardian agrees to:
 - Sign the consent form to participate in TTS.
 - Conduct active monitoring for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 each day before and after ECE program attendance.
 - Immediately contact their or their child's healthcare provider and school if any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 develop.
 - Refrain from attending the child care facility (in the case of adult teacher or staff), or sending the participating child to the child care facility if any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 develop.
 - Notify the child care facility of any new or additional close contact exposure to an individual with COVID-19 or suspected COVID-19 that is identified while participating in Test to Stay.
 - Promptly leave or pick up their child from the ECE program, should they test positive or develop signs or symptoms of COVID-19 while at school.
 - Comply with public health recommendations for quarantine when not attending

the ECE program. (i.e. Stay home away from others.)

- **No Special Circumstances** - If an ECE program is experiencing an outbreak of COVID-19 that has been difficult to control or is unusual in size or scope, regional and local epidemiologists may apply professional judgment and recommend that the TTS method be temporarily paused and traditional quarantine standards applied until the situation is stabilized.

Individuals NOT Eligible for Test to Stay

- Children less than 2 years of age
- Individuals who are up-to-date on COVID-19 vaccines (not necessary as these individuals do not need to quarantine)
- Individuals who test positive for COVID-19
- Individuals with signs and symptoms of COVID-19
- Individuals who are not able to wear masks
- All other individuals exempt from quarantine (see [Close Contact Exemptions](#) above)

Section 2: Recommended testing and quarantine response protocols

- [Protocol A: For asymptomatic close contacts](#)
- [Protocol B: For individuals who test positive for COVID-19](#)
- [Protocol C: For symptomatic individuals](#)

Please see [Flowchart](#) for an overview of Test to Stay Guidance.

Protocol A: For asymptomatic close contacts

Close contacts who are asymptomatic, not eligible for COVID-19 vaccination or not up to date on COVID-19 vaccines, and not [exempt from TTS](#) and quarantine should follow Protocol A (see chart below.)

Close contacts who are up to date on COVID-19 vaccines and are asymptomatic do not need to follow Protocol A and may remain in the ECE program and fully engaged in all activities. However, they should continue to monitor for [symptoms](#) and wear a mask around others for 10 days after their exposure. These individuals should also be [tested](#) for COVID-19 five days after the exposure occurred. If any symptoms develop, they should immediately isolate at home and follow [Protocol C: For symptomatic individuals](#).

Protocol A: For eligible asymptomatic close contacts
Eligible for Test to Stay: Yes
Brief Summary: Eligible close contacts who are asymptomatic and do not qualify for the exemptions listed above may opt to participate in TTS (Protocol A-1) or traditional quarantine (Protocol A-2).

Protocol A-1: Test to Stay

Eligible close contacts may remain in school as long as all of the following conditions are met:

- The individual takes a COVID-19 rapid antigen test daily for 5 days after the last exposure to the individual with COVID-19 (Day 0), and the result is negative each day.
 - The rapid COVID-19 test may be taken in the morning before attending the ECE program or the evening prior, ideally after 7pm.
 - Rapid testing may be performed at home with a proctored test, such as the eMed Abbott BinaxNOW Antigen At Home Test Kit.
 - Rapid testing may be performed upon arrival to the ECE Program if the program has resources to do so and if the individual does not ride the school bus and is driven by a parent/guardian. If necessary, schools may consider allowing students who will test in the morning at school to ride the bus.
 - The individual does not need to take a rapid test on mornings that fall on weekends or holidays (or the evenings prior); however, they must quarantine on these days (i.e. the individual is not to attend birthday parties, sporting events, or any other group activities on these days).
- The individual immediately isolates at home if they receive a positive test result (see [Protocol B](#) for individuals who test positive).
- The individual must have at least one negative rapid test after the last exposure to the individual with COVID-19 (Day 0) and before returning to the ECE program.
- The individual must have at least one negative rapid test on or after the 5th day after exposure (Day 5) before being released from TTS.
- The individual remains asymptomatic.
- The individual is monitored for [symptoms of COVID-19](#) for 10 days, and immediately isolates at home if symptoms develop (see [Protocol C](#) for symptomatic individuals)
- The individual wears a mask, except when eating, drinking, or sleeping for 10 days after the exposure (Days 1-10).
 - When masking is not possible, such as meals, snacks, and naptime, individuals in Test to Stay should be 6 feet away from others for 10 days after the exposure whenever possible, ensuring that children are still safely under provider supervision. To ensure confidentiality, VDH recommends that all individuals maintain 6 feet of distance between each other during unmasked periods.

Notes: If the individual is unable to wear a mask at school then should follow guidelines for traditional quarantine (Protocol A-2). While participating in TTS, the individual should quarantine from all non-school related activities (i.e. sporting events, birthday parties, etc.).

In the case of a household exposure, the individual with COVID-19 isolating at home should minimize close contact with others in the household as much as possible. This includes having the person with COVID-19 stay in a separate bedroom and use a separate bathroom if possible, staying at least 6 feet apart, minimizing time spent with each other, wearing well-fitted masks, and improving air flow by opening a window. Those participating in Test to Stay after close contact with a household member with COVID-19 should count the date of last close contact with the individual with COVID-19 as Day 0. If the individual with COVID-19 is able to completely separate from the close contact during the isolation period, then the date of last contact (Day 0) is the last day the close contact was [exposed to the individual with COVID-19](#), which may be before the individual with COVID-19 ends home isolation. Complete

separation means not having [close contact exposure](#) the entire time the person with COVID-19 is isolating.

If the individual with COVID-19 is **not** able to completely separate from the household contact, then the exposure is considered **ongoing**. Complete separation means not having [close contact exposure](#) the entire time the person with COVID-19 is isolating. In cases of an ongoing household exposure, the [CDC recommends](#) that the exposed household contact begin quarantine at home immediately and continue to quarantine at home for an additional 5 days starting the day **after** the end of isolation for the person with COVID-19. In such cases where the individual with COVID-19 and the household close contact cannot separate from one another (such as a parent with COVID-19 who is the sole caregiver of a young child), the close contact participating in Test to Stay after a household exposure should not begin the testing period and return to the ECE program until **after** the household member's home isolation period is over.

Protocol A-2: Traditional Quarantine

Individuals 2 years of age and older, who are able and willing to wear a mask:

- Quarantine at home for 5 days (Days 1-5) from the last date of exposure (Day 0), followed by 5 days of strict mask use after return to school (Days 6-10). It is recommended to test for COVID-19 5 days after the exposure.
- The individual should immediately isolate at home if they receive a positive test result (see [Protocol B](#) for individuals who test positive.)
- The individual should continue to monitor for [symptoms of COVID-19](#) for 10 days, and immediately isolate at home if symptoms develop (see [Protocol C](#) for symptomatic individuals.)

All individuals under 2 years of age, and those 2 years of age and up who are unable or unwilling to wear a mask:

- Quarantine at home for the full 10 days from the date of exposure.

Resources:

[VDH When to End Home Isolation and Quarantine Infographic](#)

[What to do if you were potentially exposed to coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

If an individual participating in TTS tests positive for COVID-19, they must immediately isolate themselves according to [existing isolation protocols](#) ([Protocol B](#)).

Protocol B: For individuals who test positive for COVID-19

Any individual who tests positive for COVID-19 - whether vaccinated or unvaccinated, close contact or not a close contact - should follow Protocol B (see chart below.) This includes individuals who have a positive test result during TTS.

A positive test may be a rapid test (at-home or performed in a pharmacy or healthcare facility) or a PCR test. For more information on testing please see [VDH COVID-19 Testing](#). A positive rapid

test in an unvaccinated student exposed to COVID-19 during TTS does not require confirmatory PCR testing as per [CDC Guidance for Antigen Testing for SARS-CoV-2](#).

Protocol B: For individuals who test positive for COVID-19 (Isolation)

Eligible for Test to Stay: No

Individuals 2 years of age or older, who are able and willing to wear a mask:

- Isolate at home for a minimum of 5 days from the start of symptoms or positive test result, followed by mask use for the next 5 days if there are no symptoms or symptoms are resolving. This applies to anyone who tests positive, even if they are fully vaccinated, regardless of the presence or absence of symptoms.
- **Return to School:** Individuals who isolate for a positive test for COVID-19 may return to school when the following four criteria are met:
 - At least 5 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, and
 - At least 24 hours with no fever without fever-reducing medication, and
 - Other symptoms are resolving, and
 - Able to mask for the next 5 days.

If the individual tested positive and never had any symptoms, they may return to school when:

- At least 5 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 test, and
- They continue to have no symptoms since the test, and
- Able to mask for the next 5 days.

All individuals under 2 years of age, and those 2 years of age and up who are unable or unwilling to wear a mask:

- Isolate at home for the full 10 days from the start of symptoms or positive test result.

Notes: A return-to-school note from a healthcare provider is NOT necessary. A negative test at the completion of isolation is NOT required. The [CDC recommends](#) that if an individual has access to a test and wants to test, that the best approach is to use an antigen test towards the end of the 5-day isolation period, to collect the sample only if fever-free for 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication and with other symptoms improving. If the test result is positive, the individual should continue to isolate until day 10. If the test result is negative, the individual can end isolation but should continue to wear a mask around others until day 10.

Resources:

[VDH When to End Home Isolation and Quarantine Infographic](#)
[What to do if you have confirmed or suspected coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

Protocol C: For symptomatic individuals

Any individual (vaccinated or unvaccinated) who develops symptoms of COVID-19 must isolate at home. This includes individuals who develop symptoms while enrolled in TTS. The duration of isolation will depend on several factors including testing and evaluation by a healthcare provider.

Protocol C: For symptomatic individuals (Isolation)

Eligible for Test to Stay: No

Individuals who have [symptoms of COVID-19](#) must isolate at home. Duration of isolation will be dependent on testing and/or evaluation by a healthcare provider. Please see the [VDH Algorithm for Evaluating a Child with COVID-19 Symptoms or Exposure](#) for detailed guidance on evaluation, testing, and return to school.

Notes: If a close contact is symptomatic but does not have COVID-19 (determined through testing and/or evaluation by a healthcare provider), they are no longer eligible for TTS and must instead follow traditional quarantine (Protocol A-2).

Resources:

[What to do if you have confirmed or suspected coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)
[VDH Algorithm for Evaluating a Child with COVID-19 Symptoms or Exposure](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

If an individual enrolled in Test to Stay develops symptoms, but has a negative test, may they still go to school?

No. Any individual who develops symptoms must isolate at home. Even if the individual has a negative test and/or an evaluation by a health care provider finds an alternative diagnosis to explain the symptoms, the individual must complete traditional quarantine at home. They are not eligible to continue to participate in TTS.

If an individual in TTS has a positive rapid antigen test, do they require a confirmatory PCR test? What happens if a PCR test is obtained and the result is negative?

Students with a positive rapid test must isolate at home (see [Protocol B](#)) and are no longer eligible to participate in TTS. [CDC Guidelines](#) do not require confirmatory PCR testing if the person with the positive antigen test is 1) symptomatic, or 2) a close contact of a known case. Therefore, individuals in TTS (who are close contacts by definition) do not need a confirmatory PCR. If a PCR is obtained anyway and is negative, the student is still no longer eligible to participate in TTS and must complete isolation at home.

What happens if the 5th day of testing occurs during a weekend, holiday, or extended break?

The individual must have at least one negative rapid test on or after the 5th day before being released from TTS. If the first day back to child care following an extended break is 10 days or more after the exposure, the student does not need to be tested upon return to school provided

that they have not experienced any symptoms.

How will a parent/guardian conducting an at-home proctored COVID-19 test communicate the results to the child care center?

VDH encourages child care centers to develop a secure mechanism for receiving results from at-home proctored tests. Child care centers may also consider alternative options such as obtaining parental attestation of the test results before the individual may proceed with participation in child care.

If an individual enrolls in Test to Stay after an exposure to a household member with COVID-19, when should the individual start the testing period and return to the child care center?

The individual participating in Test to Stay should begin the testing period after the last date of close contact exposure to the individual with COVID-19. If the individual with COVID-19 is **not** able to completely separate from the household contact, then the exposure is considered **ongoing**. In this case, If the individual with COVID-19 ended home isolation on Day 5, this counts as the last day of close contact exposure (Day 0) for the individual participating in Test to Stay. (The individual with COVID-19 may end home isolation on Day 5, assuming they have had no fever for 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication and their other symptoms have improved.) The individual participating in TTS must have a negative COVID-19 test after the last close contact exposure to the individual with COVID-19 and before returning to in-person instruction.

If a student identified as a close contact continues to be exposed to a household member with COVID-19 on Days 6-10 after the individual with COVID-19's home isolation has ended, does the student have to wait until after Day 10 to enroll in Test to Stay?

No. If the individual with COVID-19 ended home isolation on Day 5, this counts as the last day of close contact exposure (Day 0) for the individual participating in Test to Stay, assuming they were not able to completely separate within the household. The individual participating in Test to Stay may return to the child care center after having a negative COVID-19 test and then continue the Test to Stay testing period.

Flowchart

Virginia Department of Health Test to Stay (TTS) Guidance for ECE/Childcare Flowchart

March 9, 2022

